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Faith in the Boardinghouse: New Views of Thoreau Family Religion

Robert A. Gross

[Editor's Note: This is one of the papers presented during the second of two panels on "The Emersons' Parlor and Mrs. Thoreau's Dinner Table: Transcendental Conversations" at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association in Philadelphia, 30 December 2004.]

Students of Henry David Thoreau have finally gotten religion. Long accustomed to portraying "the man of Concord" as a secular figure—nature writer, political dissenter, and man of letters—we have recently come to appreciate the springs of faith that nourished his sense of self and inspired his art. Alan Hodder has opened up Thoreau's texts to reveal the spiritual seeker admired by such contemporaries as the Unitarian minister John Weiss. In an appreciative review published in the *Christian Examiner* three years after Thoreau's death, Weiss portrayed his Harvard classmate as a "pure soul" reminiscent of Jonathan Edwards, with a relish for "the indwelling love and beauty" of God immanent in the natural world. "No writer of the present day is more religious," Weiss observed. In this vein, Thoreau joins Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Parker, as depicted by Phyllis Cole and Dean Grodzins, in illustration of Perry Miller's famous formulation that Transcendentalism was, at bottom, a "religious demonstration." Yet, unlike those erstwhile clerics, Thoreau does not fit easily in the genealogy of New England piety from Edwards to Emerson. So private was his faith, so eclectic its sources from the New Testament to the Bhagavad Gita, and so centered on interior moments of "ecstatic experience" that Thoreau seemingly merits his reputation as a hermit resolved "not to live in this restless, nervous, bustling, trivial Nineteenth Century, but stand or sit thoughtfully while it goes by." No favorite aunt transmitted to him the legacy of eminent divines imbued with New Light enthusiasm; no father figure epitomized the genteel, status-conscious evasions of "liberal" Protestantism. Responding to ineffable currents deep within his soul, Thoreau appears as solitary and

pure as Walden Pond.¹

Yet, religion in early nineteenth-century New England was a family matter, and as biographers from Sanborn on have recognized, Thoreau was surrounded in his youth by relatives caught up in the holy wars that divided the sons and daughters of Puritans against one another. His grandparents on both sides were once pillars of the establishment. When John and Rebecca Thoreau moved from Boston to Concord in the late 1790s, they immediately entered the Reverend Ezra Ripley's village circle, worshiping at his church, hosting him for tea, and joining in his Federalist crusade against radicalism and "infidelity." Allied with them were Captain Jonas Minot, a prominent figure in the local elite, and his new wife Mary Dunbar, who arrived from Keene, New Hampshire, in 1798 with four children, including twelve-year-old daughter Cynthia, from her first marriage to the former minister Asa Dunbar. Though no church member himself, Minot was a faithful servant in Ripley's campaign for orthodoxy; from 1797 to 1800 he headed a key instrument of that effort, the Charitable Library Society, to which the Thoreau family readily donated volumes of sermons and moral advice. Rebecca Thoreau, widowed in 1801, had a strong streak of piety. As a young woman, she agonized over the state of her soul, fearing to join her local church "without clear evidence of regeneration," and even after she overcame those doubts, she continued to thirst for spiritual experience. In the winter of 1810, Concord felt the stirring of a mini-revival as anxious members of Ripley's congregation gathered in one another's homes for "religious conferences," usually under the parson's supervision. Rebecca Thoreau played host to one such meeting before the minister, fearful of "disputations and irregularities," called the whole thing off. At her death in 1814, Ripley eulogized the widow as a Christian after his own heart. Serenely indifferent to theological controversy, she focused on holy living. "One of the best of mothers," Ripley wrote in an anonymous tribute for *The Christian Disciple* in October 1815, the faithful woman "excelled many [C]hristians in

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meekness, charity, and patient submission to the will of God.”²

True to their stepmother’s example, Elizabeth, Jane, Mary, and Maria Thoreau made public professions of faith over the years from 1801 to 1818. So did Cynthia Dunbar in 1811. All single women in their late teens and early twenties, they entered a pious sisterhood. In a pattern common in New England Congregationalism, seven out of ten members of the Concord church were women. But in 1826 the “Misses Thoreau,” as they were often called in the town records, bolted from Ripley’s fold. No longer willing to suppress misgivings over the parson’s “liberal” preaching, they enlisted in the orthodox fight to restore “the primitive faith of the New England pilgrims.” Elizabeth, Jane, and Maria Thoreau were among the “little band” of nine doughty dissenters who deserted Ripley’s flock in May 1826 and founded a Trinitarian church. Soon they were recruiting their kin. In April 1827, sister-in-law Cynthia Thoreau sought and won approval to leave the First Church in anticipation of joining its rival. But as it turned out, she never did. Fourteen months later, she returned to the family pew in the First Church, having “changed her mind,” as Ezra Ripley happily noted in the church records. According to Walter Harding, who drew on the oral memories collected by Edward Emerson, the stumbling-block was the official creed that all members of the Trinitarian church were obliged to embrace. Cynthia Thoreau refused to accept it “verbatim,” and the church would not allow her “staunch independence.” By contrast, the creed proved no problem for her siblings: brother Charles Dunbar began worshiping with the Trinitarians in 1829, sister Louisa Dunbar joined them six years later. In a Calvinist family circle, Cynthia Thoreau and her husband John stood alone.³

How do we understand these diverging paths? The story I have just laid out is pretty much what Walter Harding presented back in 1962, and there has been little to add in the years since. It was consequently very much to my surprise that two years ago, while researching the Concord church

split of 1826, I accidentally happened upon a collection of letters casting new light on Thoreau family religion and Cynthia’s choice. Looking into the background of the Reverend Daniel Southmayd, the first pastor of the Trinitarian church, who served from 1827 to 1832, I noticed that he had died in 1837, at age 34, in a land far from Concord, the war-torn territory of Texas, which had just defeated Santa Anna and proclaimed its independence. What was this Yankee preacher and radical abolitionist doing in Texas, whose incorporation into the Union would be fiercely opposed by most of his former parishioners?⁴ Thanks to Google.com, I got my answer in an instant from the Southmayd family website: the minister had gone there with his family as an agent for the American Bible Society; at his death, his widow Joanna stayed in Texas, remarried, and raised her children, who held onto the substantial collection of letters she had written to her family back in Vermont. Fortunately, those manuscripts were treasured by descendants, who gave transcripts to “webmaster” Jeffrey Southmayd for dissemination to “any interested person.” Unfortunately, he no longer has any contact information for the Galveston County resident, Margery Gribon Norris, who owns the originals. Still, I have no doubt the transcripts are authentic, albeit marred by errors. Within them is a new view of how Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau chose not to follow her relatives into the Trinitarian church.

The story unfolds in the parlor of the Shattuck house on Main Street, which John and Cynthia Thoreau rented from Concord’s richest merchant in the spring of 1827, their third residence in Concord village in four years. With a fledgling pencil business to run and four growing children to support, the couple struggled to make ends meet, and to this end Cynthia decided to imitate her sisters-in-law living in the old Thoreau home on the town common and take in boarders. Among the first tenants arriving in the fall were the newlyweds Daniel Southmayd, the Trinitarian minister, and his wife Joanna, who had, in all likelihood, been steered in Cynthia’s direction by those pillars of the church, Elizabeth, Jane, and Maria Thoreau. It seemed a good match, for Cynthia Thoreau was evidently impressed by the young parson, having left the aging Ripley’s church only days before Southmayd’s ordination. Joanna Southmayd, in turn, enjoyed her new household. “We are boarding in a very genteel [genteeel] pleasant family,” she wrote her mother in September 1827. “The worst I fear is that this society is so enjoyable that it will beguile us of too much of our time.” Actually, the problem proved more serious: for all her “agreeable” housekeeping, the landlady was not in complete harmony with Trinitarian beliefs, and she was unwilling to keep her doubts to herself. “There are few subjects,” Southmayd went on, “upon which we can converse together without some little collision of feeling.” At issue was the nature of Christ: was he God “manifest in the flesh,” as the Trinitarians contended, or a creature of God’s will, whether

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his son or some other sacred being, as the Unitarians claimed?

I had a very serious conversation with Mrs. T., in which I told her my views and feeling respecting the Saviour. She said her views were the same, yet acknowledged that she could not see how he was Divine. She could not receive Him as such. I told her I saw a vast difference between her views and mine. It would make a vast change in my mind to believe that I must reserve a higher homage for another being than Jesus Christ. I warned her with as much tenderness and faithfulness as I could, of that pride of reasoning which she exhibited much of.... I am afraid she is blind to the truth—yet she takes up sermons, which hold forth the character of Christ & professes to agree with them.... She says she prays to Christ without any feeling that he is inferior.

Joanna Southmayd was skeptical of such assurances, and she was right. Despite all the arguments and pleadings from her tenants and her relatives, Cynthia Thoreau could not swallow her reservations or go against her conscience. By February 1828 the Southmayds were keeping house on their own, aided “by presents and sewing” from the Misses Thoreau, and six months later, Cynthia

Thoreau was back in the established church, whose new covenant she would sign in 1832, affirming a broad belief in “One God, the Father of all, and in Jesus Christ his Son, our Saviour, the One Mediator between God & man.”⁵ The only trace of her presence among the Trinitarians was a folio edition of Brown’s *Self-Interpreting Bible*, which rested on a reading stand long after its donor had taken herself and her doubts back to Doctor Ripley’s meetinghouse.⁶

Cynthia Thoreau was, then, no Trinitarian, and although she could easily have transferred her membership from the old church to the new, she refused to compromise her beliefs. So, why was she drawn to the breakaway church in the first place? Perhaps, like other dissenters, she craved a more strenuous faith than Ezra Ripley offered. Under his Arminian pastorate, the First Church relaxed its conditions for admission: no longer need applicants testify to their experience of divine grace nor make “public confession” of their sins. Eager to draw every inhabitant into its embrace, Ezra Ripley asked only a profession of Christian faith and a resolve to lead a moral life. Cynthia Dunbar met those terms when she joined in July 1811, and yet six months later she became pregnant with John Thoreau’s child. At their wedding in May 1812, she was well on her way to giving birth to daughter Helen Louisa the following October. Did this premarital pregnancy stir concern in the First Church? Not at all. The body had long since abandoned the Puritan practice of disciplining wayward members. Cynthia Thoreau’s sexual morality was a private affair. That would

not have been the case with the Trinitarians, who restored all the policies Ezra Ripley had jettisoned. The orthodox church demanded “spiritual relations” from applicants; it required public confession of sins; it exacted conformity to its strict covenant; and it actively policed morality. In that perfectionist spirit, the church would enlist without hesitation in Garrison’s antislavery crusade.⁷

Far from producing a peaceful community of saints, such activism bred constant conflict. At the very moment Cynthia Thoreau was contemplating membership, the Trinitarian church was deeply divided. Some of the founding members, perhaps including the Misses Thoreau, were unhappy with the new pastor, who supposedly allowed too much room for human effort in the divine work of conversion. So bitter did this dispute become that one alienated member, Joseph C. Green, assailed the minister and the church in a Boston religious periodical, and for his pains he was put on trial and formally excommunicated. The conflict took a severe toll on members’ morale, and so did the heavy burden under which the congregation staggered to pay for its handsome meetinghouse and its minister’s modest salary.

Was this an auspicious home for a strong-minded woman with conscientious doubts about its creed? Hardly, and if Cynthia Thoreau needed any other reasons to rejoin the establishment, she might have reflected that few families in the village elite—a social

circle she frequented—had crossed over to the new church. Under these circumstances the minister’s daughter may well have consulted the wisdom of her late father (who died when she was an infant), along with the urging of parson Ripley, and opted for unity with her neighbors:

Every good man and true [Asa Dunbar once declared] allows his fellow-creatures the right of private judgment; he embraces them with kindness, without all regard to those little peculiarities that are apt to kindle animosity and raise contentions in weak minds, and looks with indifference upon the harmless prejudices and frivolous superstitions of the multitude.

Cynthia’s son Henry David would prove to be less forbearing. Yet, as a ten-year-old boy witnessing the religious struggles in the boardinghouse, he may well have drawn several conclusions. First, no one should ever sacrifice his conscience to the claims of others, whether family, friends, or fellow travelers in the world of reform. “Is there not a sort of blood shed when the conscience is wounded?” he asked in “Civil Disobedience.” The second lesson was to reject organized religion in all its denominational forms. In the pursuit of purity, Concord had become a battlefield of squabbling parsons and warring churches. Like many other observers, Thoreau was appalled

There is more religion in men's science than there is science in their religion.

“Sunday” chapter, *A Week*

by the vicious sectarianism. "The Gods are of no sect, they side with no man." Far better, he determined, to go his own way and let others do the same. His Sabbaths were spent in the woods. One Sunday morning he made his way down the village street with a pine sapling he had just dug up for transplanting. Transcendentalist and tree passed by the Trinitarian meetinghouse as the worshipers were coming out. Distressed by the flagrant Sabbath-breaking, Louisa Dunbar rebuked her nephew. But Thoreau was unapologetic. "Aunt Louisa, I have been worshiping in my way and I don't trouble you in your way." Religion, in his view, was a private affair. As Hodder notes, it acquired meaning not in creeds and public professions but in interior experience. "We check and express the divinity that stirs within us," he complained, "to fall down & worship that is dead without us.... If it were not for death & funerals, I think the institution of the church would stand no longer."

In such opinions, Thoreau articulated a disenchantment with official institutions that was shared by many of his contemporaries. With the separation of church and state in 1834, scores of Concord residents "signed off" from all denominations, Unitarian, Trinitarian, and Universalist alike. Thoreau was hardly alone in declaring his desire not "to be regarded as a member of any incorporated society which I have not joined." Out of the sectarian politics of Massachusetts in the 1820s and 1830s his neighbors had developed a commitment to voluntary religious choice. That was an unyielding conviction Thoreau inherited from his proud, independent mother. And it is surely a principle of continuing relevance today.

Notes

1. Alan D. Hodder, *Thoreau's Ecstatic Witness* (New Haven, 2001), pp. 1–23 (quotation, p. 16); Phyllis Cole, *Mary Moody Emerson and the Origins of Transcendentalism: A Family History* (New York, 1998); Dean Grodzins, *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2002); Kevin Van Anglen, "Reading Transcendentalist Texts Religiously: Emerson, Thoreau, and the Myth of Secularization," in John L. Mahoney, ed., *Seeing into the Life of Things: Essays on Literature and Religious Experience* (New York, 1998); Charles Capper, "A Little Beyond": The Problem of the Transcendentalist Movement in American History," in Charles Capper and Conrad Edick Wright, eds., *Transient and Permanent: The Transcendentalist Movement and Its Contexts* (Boston, 1999), pp. 26–29; Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden and Resistance to Civil Government*, ed. William Rossi (2nd ed., New York, 1992), p. 220.

2. "Sketches of the Life of Mrs. Rebecca Thoreau," *The Christian Disciple* 3 (October 1815): 289–94. In a telling indication of Ripley's authorship, Rebecca Thoreau won praise for "declining to read controversial publications on religious subjects, lest her mind should be perplexed more than edified..." (p. 292). The Concord parson was constantly reminding his congregation to avoid unnecessary debate about things "not essential" to true faith. For the Thoreau and Minot families' involvement in the Charitable Library Society, see Robert A. Gross, *Much Instruction from Little Reading: Books and Libraries in Thoreau's Concord* (Worcester,

Mass., 1987), pp. 156–57.

3. Walter Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau: A Biography* (rev. ed., N.Y., 1982), pp. 23–25; Hubert H. Hoeltje, "Thoreau in Concord Church and Town Records," *New England Quarterly* 12 (June 1939): 349–59; entry for 22 April 1827, Concord First Church Record Book (transcript), p. 253, Concord Free Public Library (CFPL); "Encouraging Prospects," *Boston Recorder and Telegraph*, 9 June 1826. Thomas Kettell, the seventy-four-year-old brother of the late Rebecca Kettell Thoreau, also began worshiping with the Trinitarians in 1828; his seventy-year-old sister Mary prayed along with him and also joined the Trinitarian Ladies' Sewing Society at its founding in 1828. (Elizabeth, Jane, and Sarah Thoreau were also founding members, and Maria Thoreau served as treasurer and one of the society's directors from its start.) Taken together, the Misses Thoreau, the Dunbars, and Kettell constituted the entire kin network of John and Cynthia Thoreau, along with their four children, in Concord by the late 1820s. All but John and Cynthia were Trinitarians. For the Thoreau genealogy, see Edmund Hudson, "The Wide Spreading Jones Family," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 27 June 1917; Raymond Adams, "The Thoreau Family," MS chart, Concord Pamphlet 17, Item A.27.a.; and Leonard F. Kleinfeld, Thoreau genealogical chart (1976), Concord Pamphlet 21, Item 17, CFPL. For the Dunbar family, see Clifford K. Shipton, "Asa Dunbar," in Shipton and John Langdon Sibley, *Biographical Sketches of Those Who Attended Harvard College ... With Bibliographical and Other Notes*, vols. 4–17 (Cambridge, Mass., 1933–1975), 16:463. For the Kettell clan, see Thomas Bellows Wyman and Henry Herbert Edes, *The Genealogies and Estates of Charlestown, in the County of Middlesex and Commonwealth of Massachusetts 1629–1818*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1879).

4. Daniel Southmayd served as a Massachusetts delegate to the 1834 Philadelphia convention that created the American Anti-Slavery Society. See John F. Hume, *The Abolitionists: Together with Personal Memories of the Struggle for Human Rights, 1830–1864* (New York and London, 1905), ch. 23.

5. Joanna Kent Southmayd, Concord, to Betsey Kent, Benson, Vermont, 24 September and 30 October 1827, Southmayd family letters (transcripts); covenant of First Church, 31 August 1832, Concord First Church Record Book (transcript), pp. 272–77. Maria Thoreau felt especially close to the Southmayds, and long after they had left New England for Texas, she was still recalling them with affection. In 1876, living in Bangor, Maine, Maria Thoreau received a letter from a friend, Harriet Lincoln Wheeler, in which Joanna Kent Southmayd's name came up. "This reminds me of your mention of Mrs. Southmayd," she replied, "how delighted I should be to hear from her." Maria Thoreau to Harriet Lincoln Wheeler, 5 December 1876, in Thoreau Family Correspondence, CFPL. I am grateful to Sandy Petruson for providing me with a transcript of this letter.

6. John Wood Sweet, "'Churches Gathered Out of Churches': The Divergence of Liberal and Orthodox Congregationalists in Concord, Massachusetts, 1800–1850" (senior honors thesis, Amherst College, 1988), pp. 60, 69–78. *The Self-Interpreting Bible ... [with] Explanatory Notes and Evangelical Reflections*, compiled by the Reverend John Brown, a self-taught Scottish weaver who became a Presbyterian minister in his native land, was first reprinted in the United States in 1792. President George Washington headed the list of subscribers. It was reissued in 1820, 1822, and apparently 1826 in a folio edition

of 1,223 pages. In its appeal to self-trust, both on the author's and reader's part, the volume was a fitting gift from a Thoreau. See Margaret T. Hills, *The English Bible in America: A Bibliography of Editions of the Bible & the New Testament Published in America 1777–1957* (New York, 1961), pp. 8–9, 63, 67, and 85.

7. The history of the First Church under Ezra Ripley's ministry and of the separation of the Trinitarians in 1826 is set forth in chapters two and three of my *The Transcendentalists and Their World* (in progress). See also John Wood Sweet, "The Liberal Dilemma and the Demise of the Town Church: Ezra Ripley's Pastorate in Concord, 1778–1841," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 104 (1992): 73–109.

8. Asa Dunbar, *An Oration: Delivered at the Reverend T. Harrington's Church, Lancaster, June twenty-fifth, Anno Lucis 5781, upon the Festival of St. John the Baptist; in Presence of the Brethren of Trinity Lodge, No. 6, of the Most Ancient and Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons, under the Jurisdiction of the most worshipful Grand Lodge in Boston, Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (Worcester, Mass.: Isaiah Thomas, 1781), p. 11; quoted in Shipton, "Asa Dunbar," p. 460.

9. Thoreau quoted in Hodder, *Thoreau's Ecstatic Witness*, p. 136; Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience"; and Gross, "'That Terrible Thoreau': Concord and Its Hermit."

John Andrew, Wood Engraver James Dawson

I recently bought a lot of books that contained a copy of George Canning Hill's *Benedict Arnold: A Biography* (Boston: E.G. Libby and Co., 1858), which has an engraved title page signed by John Andrew, one of the partners in Baker & Andrew, the wood engravers whose names appear on the title page of the first edition of *Walden* under the engraving of Thoreau's house. Written in pencil on an unsigned post-it note placed on the book's front pastedown page is the following information about Andrew:

John Andrew (1815–1875) wood engraver & designer. Born at Hull (Eng.) in 1815, was at Boston by 1851, when he exhibited a wood engraving at the Annual Fair of Am. Institute in NYC. He remained at Boston apparently until his death there—1875. In 1853/54 he was partner in Baker & Andrew & from 1858 in Andrew & Filmer[.] Had a son John who also did wood engraving[.]

Baker & Andrew Engravers Boston 1854[.] Partnership—Wm. Jay Baker & John Andrew after the dissolution of Baker, Smith & Andrew[.] Andrew & Filmer, Engravers Boston 1858–60 & after[.] Partners John Andrew & John Filmer[.] Hamilton cites examples of later work in Holmes Autocrat of the Breakfast table, Boston 1858 & Arabian Day's [sic] Entertainment's 1858.

I have not been able to find the source of all the information on this note. The "Hamilton" referred to in the last sentence is certainly Sinclair Hamilton, whose two-volume *Early American Book Illustrators and Wood Engravers 1670–1870* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1958, 1968)

is a standard reference work. Hamilton's second volume contains biographical information on mid-nineteenth-century wood engravers and artists, including Sophia Thoreau, who drew the original sketch of Thoreau's Walden house. This volume also contains a paragraph on Andrew, but because it does not have some of the information in the note above (Andrew's birthplace, when he came to Boston, or Baker's full name), it was not the source, although it does confirm some of the note's

information (e.g. the dates of the partnerships).

Hamilton describes Andrew as one of the leading wood engravers in the country and lists several albums containing hundreds of proofs of Andrews' work—but apparently not the proof for *Walden*, which Hamilton surely would have noted. Neither of Hamilton's volumes contains information on William Jay Baker, the other partner in the firm commissioned to render Sophia's drawing as an engraving for *Walden*'s title page. Hamilton's information on *Walden* is mainly a description of the book with some unflattering, and I think undeserved, comments about Sophia's artistic ability: "unusually untalented," "feebley artistic," "caricature," and "atrocious."

I am hopeful that this note will lead to further discoveries about John Andrew and William Jay Baker, the two men who helped make one of the most famous title pages in literature (see also Bradley P. Dean, "The Title-Page Illustration of *Walden*," *Thoreau Society Bulletin* No. 245 [Fall 2003]: 7).

The author is grateful to Bob Fleck of Oak Knoll Books in New Castle, Delaware, for assistance with Hamilton's second volume.

An Orthodox Prayer that Thoreau Admired

Bradley P. Dean

Although Thoreau is one of America's most religiously oriented canonical authors, one does not have to look far in his writings to find a splenetic remark about religion. He genuinely revered the religious sentiment but just as genuinely despised the various behaviors that, in his view, perverted that sentiment. For instance, in "Life without Principle" he castigates "the spirit of sect and bigotry" for having infected not just our religion, but even "our science and philosophy...."

John Andrew (1815–1875)
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The problem seems to have been one of definition and perhaps emphasis. For many folks, religion has to do with the particular personality profile of an older, gray-bearded fellow residing in the clouds, holding a shepherd's crook, and wearing a crown of gold. Public discourse about this fellow was so often contentious that some lyceums of Thoreau's time voted to exclude religious topics altogether. The lyceum of Amherst, New Hampshire, apparently had such a stricture, but Thoreau ignored it when he lectured there in December 1856. By his own account, he walked into the basement vestry of Amherst's Congregationalist Church, where the Amherst Lyceum met, and did his best, as he phrased it, "to make a clean breast of what religion I have experienced, and the audience never suspected what I was about. The lecture was as harmless as moonshine to them." What was the lecture that he regarded as religious but that his Amherst auditors regarded as moonshine? It was his most frequently delivered lecture, "Walking." When was the last time you heard "Walking" described as a *religious* essay!

On rare occasions Thoreau expresses admiration, rather than his usual disdain, for one or another aspect of orthodox religion. In January 1852, for instance, he mentions the success experienced by the Reverend Daniel Foster, a Congregationalist minister, in dealing with local ne'er-do-wells, such as the local rum-sellers. Foster was an extraordinarily ardent temperance man, but because he dealt with everyone, including rum-sellers, in a straightforward, "frank & manly" fashion rather than being "all things to all men," the local rum-sellers and other ne'er-do-wells actually liked Foster—and for Thoreau, that constituted Foster's success.

Seven months later Thoreau again expressed admiration for a specific aspect of religious orthodoxy. He had checked out of the Concord Town Library a copy of Lieutenant Sherard Osborn's *Stray Leaves from an Arctic Journal; or, Eighteen Months in the Polar Regions, in Search of Sir John Franklin's Expedition, in the Years 1850–51* (New York: George P. Putnam's, 1852), and was reading the book on the night of 27 August 1852 at his desk beneath the west window in the third-floor attic study-bedroom of his parents' house on Main Street. After reading Osborn's remarks about the superiority of Esquimaux clothing on pp. 20–21, he took down his extract notebook on Indians ("Indian Book volume 6," he called it) and transcribed the passage onto p. 56. A little later he read a remark about a cold-stunted birch being the "monarch" of the arctic forest, and he transcribed that passage from p. 29 of Osborn onto p. 119 of his natural history commonplace book. Later still he read on p. 43 Osborn's description of the quietude of arctic nights, and he extracted that passage onto p. 119 of his natural history commonplace book. Then he read more than seventy-five pages of Osborn's book before coming to the passage below, from pp. 119–120, which inspired him to write in his journal: "I am struck by the ease and simplicity with which an Englishman expresses a sentiment of reverence for the

author and ruler of the universe. It is very manly—and appears to some extent to characterize the nation. Osborn in his Arctic Journal prints with such simplicity a prayer which had been prepared for the Arctic expedition." Here is the passage—including the prayer—that so impressed Thoreau:



On November the 8th [1850], two officers [of the British Navy] ascended the heights of Griffith's Island [in Parry Channel north of Peel Sound, 74° 34' N, 95° 33' W], and at noon tide caught the last glimpse of the sun, as it happened to be thrown up by refraction, though in reality it was seventeen miles below our horizon. We were now fairly about to undergo a dark, arctic winter, in 74½ degrees of north latitude; and light-hearted and confident as we felt in our resources of every description, one could not, when looking around the dreary scene which spread around us on every side, but feel how much our lives were in His hands who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb; and wanting must he have been in feeling who did not offer up a heartfelt prayer that returning day and returning summer might find him able and fit to undergo the hardship and fatigue of journeys on foot, to seek for his long-lost fellow-seamen. On leaving England, amongst the many kind, thoughtful presents, both public and private, none struck me as being more appropriate than the following form of prayer:—

A PRAYER FOR THE ARCTIC EXPEDITION.

"O Lord God, our Heavenly Father, who teachest man knowledge, and givest him skill and power to accomplish his designs, we desire continually to wait, and call, and depend upon Thee. Thy way is in the sea, and Thy paths in the great waters. Thou rulest and commandest all things. We therefore draw nigh unto Thee for help in the great work which we now have to do.

"Leave us not, we beseech Thee, to our own counsel, nor to the imaginations of our own foolish and deceitful hearts: but lead us by the way wherein we should go, that discretion may preserve us, and understanding may keep us. Do Thou, O Lord, make our way prosperous, and give us Thy blessing and good success. Bring all needful things to our remembrance; and where we have not the presence of mind, nor the ability, to perform Thy will, magnify Thy power in our weakness. Let Thy good providence be our aid and protection, and Thy Holy Spirit our Guide and Comforter, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul. Endue us with such strength and patience as may carry us through every toil and danger, whether by sea or land; and, if it be Thy good pleasure, vouchsafe to us a safe return to our families and homes.

"And, as Thy Holy Word teaches us to pray for others, as well as for ourselves, we most humbly beseech Thee, of Thy goodness, O Lord, to comfort and succour all those who

are in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity, especially such as may now be exposed to the dangers of the deep, or afflicted with cold and hunger. Bestow upon them Thy rich mercies; according to their several wants and necessities, and deliver them out of their distress. They are known to Thee by name, let them be known of Thee as the children of Thy grace and love. Bless us all with Thy favour, in which is life, and with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus; and grant us so to pass the waves of this troublesome world, that finally we may come unto Thy everlasting kingdom. Grant this, for Thy dear Son's sake, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

(Author's Note: I am grateful to Leslie Perrin Wilson, Curator of Special Collections at the Concord Free Public Library, for checking for me the January 1865 shelf list of the Concord Town Library, where the Osborn entry appears on p. 105. Robert Sattelmeyer's "Bibliographic Catalogue" in *Thoreau's Reading*, p. 246, item 1049, mistakenly cites Thoreau's source as the 1852 London edition of Osborn's *Stray Leaves*, rather than the Boston edition.)

The Portrait of John Thoreau, Jr.

James Dawson

Recent visitors to the Concord Museum may have noticed that the unsigned portrait of John Thoreau, Jr., which was long thought to have been the work of his sister Sophia, is now attributed to artist Nathum Ball Onthank. David Wood, Curator of the Concord Museum, points out that Kenneth Walter Cameron suggested the new attribution on stylistic grounds by comparison with other Onthank portraits. Wood thought this reasonable for several reasons.

Onthank was born in Holliston, Massachusetts, in 1823. Largely self-taught, he became a well-known artist whose work was exhibited at the National Academy in 1848 and 1850, and later at the Boston Athenaeum. His best-known portraits are of Vice President Henry Wilson, U.S. Senator Charles Sumner, and abolitionist John Brown.

Unfortunately his Boston studio was destroyed by the "Great Fire" of 1872. He died in 1888.

The Concord Museum recently acquired another Onthank portrait, that of Annie Hosmer of Concord, done in 1847. Other examples of Onthank's work can be seen in the Boston Atheneum, Harvard Memorial Hall, and Fruitlands Museum.

In years past, some Thoreau biographers made sport of the portrait of John as being the work of an untalented amateur. In 1939 Henry S. Canby, apparently the first to mention the portrait and to assume that it had been painted by Sophia, wrote that she was "feeblely artistic (her portrait of

John [Thoreau] now in the Concord Antiquarian Society is atrocious, and she left one of Henry which she, perhaps wisely, wanted no one to see" (29). His statement that Sophia painted a portrait of Henry also appears to be incorrect. Joseph Wood Krutch wrote in his 1948 biography that Sophia was an "unusually untalented artist who did very bad portraits" (18), and in 1968 Walter Harding opined that Sophia's work was that of a "rank amateur" (12–13).

In the portrait's defense, however, it appears to be on a par with others done by itinerant artists of the period. But if this new attribution is correct, the portrait is the work of an artist whose work appears in museums, which might stimulate a reassessment of this oft-maligned work of art.

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Be sure to visit the Thoreau Society's e-commerce site

www.shopatwaldenpond.org

Young Thoreauvians: A Report

Laryssa Duncan

[Editor's Note: This report should have appeared in the last Bulletin but did not, an oversight for which we apologize.]

Perhaps these pages are more particularly addressed to poor students," wrote Thoreau of his readership. One-hundred and fifty years after those now-famous pages first saw print, the Thoreau Society itself addressed this important audience with the inaugural meeting of the Young Thoreauvians at this past summer's Annual Gathering.

The Young Thoreauvians is a group within the Thoreau

Society in which young members, both student and non-student, can meet and discuss issues important to them. The idea of the Young Thoreauvians stemmed from my experience with various arts organizations in and around Princeton, New Jersey, that have a Young Friends group within the regular organization, an arrangement that encourages young members to lend their support in ways comfortable to them while remaining fully within the organization. I hope the Young Thoreauvians will perform this function for the Thoreau Society.

Our first official meeting on 10 July was attended by nine Thoreauvians: some students, some not, some just young at heart. We discussed Thoreau, his writings, and the influence of those writings on our lives. A significant portion of the meeting, however, was given over to the discussion of the Thoreau Society itself and how it related to us as young members. All agreed that we enjoyed the student activities presented by Jen Wollenwebber, especially the Java Jam session at the 2003 Gathering and the presentation of student papers at this year's Gathering. We also enjoyed the outdoor excursions to various Thoreau Country spots, noting that these experiences provided us with a deeper connection to and a greater understanding of Thoreau. We also voiced our hearty approval of the student discount and the ice cream social.

In good Thoreauvian fashion, however, the meeting did not go by without some criticism. Some related that while they felt privileged to attend meetings alongside so many important writers and scholars, they were also somewhat intimidated by the experience. I can attest to this as one who came to her first Annual Gathering at the age of nineteen—and found not even a handful of fellow Thoreauvians my age in attendance. Others expressed their concern that the Gathering seemed too academic at times, leaving us with a desire for a more personal rather than formal approach to the proceedings. One member expressed the sense of having returned to a college classroom when attending some of the presentations.

After sharing our comments and concerns, we discussed ideas for future activities. We discussed many great ideas, but in the interest of space, I will mention only a few. One of the best, I thought, was creating a Young Thoreauvians website where members could have access to news, student publications, and our own listserve. Some other suggestions that met with enthusiastic responses involved expanding the outdoor excursions at the Gathering: trips geared specifically to young people, all-day and overnight excursions, even holding more sessions outside at relevant Thoreau spots (the *Walden* reading at Walden Pond was cited as an example). Finally, creating more educational sessions and expanding on the sessions already in place: two-hour workshops led by an experienced moderator, student debates, and adding more introductory or "Thoreau 101" sessions to the Gathering schedule. Collectively, these ideas expand on those activities of the Society that young members have found especially appealing by offering a more personal and gratifying connection to Thoreau and his writings.

Several of us who met during this past Annual Gathering planned to keep in touch since, anticipate planning Society activities of particular interest to us, and possibly have some of those activities in place for the 2005 Annual Gathering.

Thoreau always stressed the importance of addressing young people in his life and writings. We in the Young Thoreauvians hope to continue this effort for the Thoreau Society and its younger members.

The Thoreau Society Staff

Steven Bentley is the Society's outreach specialist. In May 2005 he will graduate with his M.Ed. in Secondary Education from the University of Massachusetts, Boston. He plans to teach Biology at the high-school level. He has a strong interest in Conservation Biology and is on the board of the New England Chapter of the Society for Conservation Biology. Before earning his B.S. in Biology at Salem State College (2003), Steven operated a commercial decorating contracting business (the family business since 1893) while working at several environmental-education centers. He came to the Thoreau Society by way of working at Walden Pond State Reservation as a Forest and Park Supervisor. He looks forward to continuing his efforts to increase domestic and international membership, outreach programs conducted by members, attendance at the Annual Gathering, and interest in the current relevance of Thoreau.

Jon Fadiman has worked at the Thoreau Society Shop at Walden Pond for nine years, starting in 1995, six months after it opened. He has an educational background in physics, electrical engineering, and marketing. After graduating from Amherst College, he took his Masters at Harvard and went on to complete some additional post-graduate work. Jon is fluent in French and speaks German, as well as some other languages. He was Director of International Sales for several computer companies and lived for a time with his family in France, where he worked as a director of two companies. Jon was brought up in a family of authors, and has himself authored many technical and travel articles. Perhaps his delight in working for the Thoreau Society is in part explained by the fact that publishing was always part of his life.

Mike Frederick is a graduate of the Harvard University Extension School, where he wrote his master's thesis in history: "Transcendental Ethos: A Study of Thoreau's Social Philosophy and Its Relation to Antebellum Reform." He has been a Thoreau Society member since 1997. From 1998 to 2000, he worked at the Thoreau Institute Media Center with Bradley P. Dean and also served as Dean's research assistant on *Wild Fruits*. After a three-year stint working for a biomedical company, Mike joined the Thoreau Society Staff in March of 2004 as Project Manager, Webmaster, and Shop Associate. He lives in Melrose, Massachusetts, with his wife Stacia and their two children, Delia and James.

Jayne Gordon has been the Society's Executive Director since January 2003 but has been involved with the Society in one capacity or another for thirty years. She is an adjunct-faculty member at Tufts University, where she teaches a curriculum-development course for the Museum Studies Program and Graduate School of Education. She also teaches the Concord History course, which is required to become licensed as an official town guide. Jayne has held the position of Director of Education at both the Thoreau Institute and the Concord Museum, and was the Director of Orchard House, home of the Alcotts, for sixteen years. In addition, she has been an educational consultant for dozens of non-profit, academic, and government organizations. Her home is located in Walden Woods (near Deep Cut), where Jayne spends much of the winter on snowshoes.

Margaret Gram just joined Thoreau Society as its bookkeeper and accountant. After raising a family of six children, Margaret returned to college and received her B.A. in English and Accounting from Northeastern University, graduating with highest

honors. She has had extensive accounting and bookkeeping experience in non-profit organizations: five years as Business Manager of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities and fourteen years at Harvard University, during which time she served as the Budget Manager for Radcliffe College and as the Financial Coordinator at the Murray Research Center, a department of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. Now retired from Harvard, she looks forward to working with members of the Thoreau Society.

Jim Hayden is a 1982 Graduate of Fitchburg (Mass.) State College, with a B.S. in Communications/Media. He has worked in museum-shop retail in the Concord area for sixteen years, first at Minute Man National Historical Park and then at the Concord Museum. He joined the Thoreau Society Staff as Retail Manager in May 2004. Jim lives in Methuen, Massachusetts, with his wife Karen and their two children, Sarah and Ian. He has been a Revolutionary War historian and reenactor for 30 years, a hobby in which his family is also very involved. He was a founder, and has served as both the Adjutant and National Chairman, of the Continental Line, an organization of over seventy reenactment units. An avid camper, gardener, and cook, Jim also serves on the Board of Directors of the Fitchburg State College Alumni Association.

Remembering Thoreau

Over the years devotees of Henry David Thoreau have remembered the Thoreau Society in major gifts or legacies. Several members of the Society's Board have made arrangements in their wills or charitable remainder trusts to make the Society a beneficiary. The Board wishes to encourage others in a position to do so to consider this way of helping the organization.

Most members will consult their own estate or legal advisors for making such arrangements. In addition, the Greater Lowell Community Foundation has agreed to facilitate arrangements or answer questions. The Foundation is at 169 Merrimack Street, Fifth Floor, Lowell MA 01852 U.S.A., tel. 1-978-970-1600. The Executive Director is David Kronberg, whose email address is dave.glc@verizon.net. The Foundation's website is www.glcfoundation.org.

As one example, the Greater Lowell Foundation can receive, on behalf of the Thoreau Society, appreciated stock to create a trust or gift annuity that would pay beneficiaries during their lives a high rate of return—the exact amount would depend on their ages at the time of the gift, and the Thoreau Society could benefit immediately through an innovative program at the Community Foundation. In both cases there would be a substantial charitable income-tax deduction. In the charitable trust case, when the last beneficiary dies, the balance would go to the Thoreau Society.

Notes & Queries

☞ We are grateful to the authors who contributed articles for this number of the Bulletin. **Robert A. Gross**, author of *The Minutemen and Their World* (25th anniversary ed., N.Y., 2001) and of the forthcoming sequel *The Transcendentalists and Their World*, is James L. and Shirley A. Draper Professor of Early American History at the University of Connecticut. **Laryssa Duncan** is a Conservation Technician in Firestone Library at Princeton University and instructor in the book arts for the Artists Guild of the YWCA, Princeton, New Jersey. **Bradley P. Dean** edits this Bulletin and edited Thoreau's *Faith in a Seed, Wild Fruits*, and *Letters to a Spiritual Seeker*. **James Dawson** owns and operates Unicorn Books in Trappe, Maryland.

☞ A paragraph on architecture on pp. 46–48 of the Princeton Edition of *Walden* ends with the following sentences: "One man says, in his despair or indifference to life, take up a handful of the earth at your feet, and paint your house that color. Is he thinking of his last and narrow house? Toss up a copper for it as well. What an abundance of leisure he must have! Why do you take up a handful of dirt? Better paint your house your own complexion; let it turn pale or blush for you. An enterprise to improve the style of cottage architecture! When you have got my ornaments ready I will wear them." If you think you might have some idea what Thoreau meant by that last sentence, please pass along the suggestion to your editor at TSB@bradleydean.com.

☞ Geraldine Brooks has an excellent essay in the 10 January 2005 *New Yorker* on Amos Bronson Alcott. She points out how he has been savaged in recent years by a few critics, particularly feminist critics, but she does a marvelous, even-handed job in describing sympathetically this most pathologically impractical and optimistic of Thoreau's contemporaries. The beef against Alcott is that his family suffered extraordinarily from his temerities. In his journal entry of 6 April 1850, Alcott wrote, "[T]o the thinker's family ... [the want of support] is no small matter...; and for the wrongs it suffers there is, nor can be, no recompense."

☞ Craig Rosebraugh's *The Logic of Political Violence: Lessons in Reform and Revolution* (Portland, Oregon: Arissa Media Group, 2004) includes a chapter titled "Theories of Nonviolence" that discusses Gandhi, Thoreau, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Quoting Thoreau ("What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn"), Rosebraugh mentions that this concept was shared by Gandhi and "was perhaps picked up by Thoreau in his readings of the Bhagavad-Vita and portions of the sacred Hindu Upanishads (Fischer, 1954, p. 38)." (The citation refers to L. Fischer's *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World*.) Rosebraugh wonders whether "the most important influence Gandhi may have extracted from Thoreau's writings was the notion of the duty of the self in listening to the just conscience," quoting Thoreau from 1849: "The only obligation I have the right to assume is to do at any time what I think is right." After quoting Thoreau's assertion that he did not feel confined by the stone walls of the prison, Rosebraugh remarks, "While I understand Thoreau's idealistic approach to prison, I find his analysis not well grounded, being chiefly based on his twenty-four hour period of incarceration." In theory, Rosebraugh says, a person locked up behind bars for years "most likely agrees with the ineffectiveness of the prison system. Yet, it would be far fetched to suggest that spending years in lock-

up does not restrict both a person's physical and mental freedom."

☞ Kari Lydersen's "Bringing People's History to the Streets" (*Punk Planet*, November/December 2003, pp. 88–91), a profile of Chicago stencil artist and poster maker Josh MacPhee, describes a poster series that started with one depicting Malcolm X. Lydersen writes: "To follow up his Malcolm X poster, MacPhee did a poster of anti-slave [sic] radical John Brown, illustrated with a quote from Henry David Thoreau. 'In school you hear about Thoreau as this do-gooder liberal,' he said. 'You don't read that he wrote this book [sic] about John Brown literally justifying any means necessary to

end slavery. You don't read that book, you read *Walden Pond* [sic].'" The poster mentioned is a three-color print—black and red on cream—from a photo of Brown (minus whiskers). Under the image is the caption: "JOHN BROWN MAY 9TH, 1800–DEC 2ND, 1859 CELEBRATE PEOPLES' HISTORY." Above the image, this Thoreau quote, in caps (the brackets below are MacPhee's): "It was his [John Brown's] peculiar doctrine that a man has a perfect right to interfere by force with the slaveholder, in order to rescue the slave. I agree with him. They who are continually shocked by slavery have some right to be shocked by the violent death of the slaveholder, but such will be more shocked by his life than his death. I shall not be forward to think him mistaken in his method who quickest succeeds to liberate the slave."

☞ A wee book of fifty-nine pages, John R. Stilgoe's *Shallow Water Dictionary: A Grounding in Estuary English* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), includes several Thoreau references. The first of these comes in examining the use of sea-marks along creeks. "Why mark the narrow creeks at all? Are the marks like the fishing poles Thoreau remarks in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, some left-behind totem of luck? No. The sea-marks are landmarks." Several pages cover the word *guzzle* ("the low [space] on barrier beaches that sometimes allow spring tides or storm tides to pass over the beach into the marshes inland from the sea"), about which Stilgoe writes, "In *Cape Cod*, Thoreau speaks of 'bars and guzzles,' but what dictionary now unlocks his words—and what he saw to write them?" A discussion of "gutters" ("dug course[s] for water") includes a long paragraph quoting a reference in *Cape Cod* about Thoreau's crossing "a brook ... called Jeremiah's gutter," saying that Thoreau had "got his English mixed." What had been a gutter had by that time become a guzzle, Stilgoe says, so widened over time that "prudent Cape Codders later filled it, to keep the outer Cape from becoming an island, just as they did the guzzle between Truro and Provincetown, which Thoreau saw filled with sods, brush, and planted beach grass." A paragraph that runs from page 43 to page 45 includes a quote from "Walking" that entails the "sauntering" etymology. (Stilgoe adds in brackets afterward: "Thoreau quotes from Worcester here, although without acknowledging his source—and Worcester took his derivation from Johnson's *Dictionary*.") On page 48 Stilgoe asserts, "Estuary English endures in authors not obsolete—everyone slightly intrigued by the natural realm reads Thoreau—and has force, an energy lacking in much standard terminology." Then he goes on to write about

colors, including chartreuse and sea-green, saying that "visualists, especially painters, poets, and historians of landscape, suffer from the fading of such specialized vocabularies. Thoreau marveled at the colors of a Cape Cod autumn, at the 'incredibly bright red of the Huckleberry, and the reddish brown of the Bayberry, mingled

with the bright and living green of small Pitch-Pines, and also the duller green of the Bayberry, Boxberry, and Plum, the yellowish green of the Shrub-oaks, and the various golden and yellow and fawn-colored tints of the Birch and Maple and Aspen.' But how do the explorers of the marsh note colors? Do they agree with Thoreau that the

colors of the marsh are 'warmer colors than I had associated with the New England coast'? Are the colors softer? What is the yellowish-green of the shrub-oaks? Chartreuse?"

☞ David R. Montgomery's *King of Fish: The Thousand-Year Run of Salmon* (Westview, 2003) quotes elliptically from *A Week*: "Henry David Thoreau lamented the absence of salmon from the Concord River: 'Salmon ... were formerly abundant here, and taken in weirs by the Indians, who taught this method to the whites, by whom they were used as food and as manure, until the dam, and afterward the canal at Billerica, and the factories at Lowell, put an end to their migrations.... Perchance, after a few thousands of years, if the fishes will be patient, and pass their summers elsewhere, meanwhile, nature will have levelled the Billerica dam, and the Lowell factories, and the Grass-ground River run clear again, to be explored by new migratory shoals.' "

☞ *Living with the Genie: Essays on Technology and the Quest for Human Mastery*, edited by Alan Lightman, Daniel Sarewitz, and Christina Desser (Island Press, 2003), includes two Thoreau mentions in Alan Lightman's book-closing piece, "The World is Too Much With Me." The first comes in a paragraph on 19th-century railroads as "technological systems [that] were large, amorphous organizations of machinery, people, and bureaucratic structures, with many levels between producer and consumer." The turn of events away from direct and personal contact between producer and consumer, writes Lightman, "led Henry David Thoreau to make one of his more famous and witty remarks: 'We do not ride on the railroad, it rides upon us.' " The essay and the book ends by citing Thoreau again: "Thoreau framed the problem [of how to use technology responsibly and wisely] well a century and a half ago when he said that we must produce better dwellings 'without making them more costly; and the cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run.' " This sentence is followed by three more that assert that such an accounting of life "can be done only by the individual. Only individuals can measure their own values and needs, their own spirit, their own quality of life."

☞ Stanley E. Flink's *Sentinel Under Siege: The Triumphs and Troubles of America's Free Press* (Westview Press, 1997), in an epilogue focusing on "what can be done [to improve journalism today?]" includes this: "Indisputably, at the center of all journalism in whatever form, there are and always will be words—morally charged or deliberately malicious, shaped by spin or sodden with ignorance. Words evoke ideas, and ideas, as Judge Holmes informed us, are incitements.... Words are the voices of memory,

making the past available. Henry David Thoreau, in the early 1840s, was visited in Concord, Massachusetts, by a reporter who wanted to get the transcendentalist's view of the new device called the telegraph. 'The President of the United States,' the reporter said excitedly, 'sent a message to the Mayor of Baltimore in a matter of minutes.' Thoreau, the story goes, pondered this news soberly and then asked, 'What did the President say?'

☞ Michelle Kozin in *Organic Weddings: Balancing Ecology, Style, and Tradition* (New Society Publishers, 2003) quotes Thoreau's remark in a letter to Blake: "What's the use of a fine house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on?"

☞ Richard H. King's *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom* (U Georgia P, 1996) contains a few interesting assertions relating to Thoreau. In a chapter that examines Isaiah Berlin's "Two Concepts of Liberty," he asserts that "there are dangers which may arise from confusing negative freedom and autonomy. [Quotes Thoreau: "It is hard to have a Southern overseer; it is worse to have a Northern one; but worst of all when you are the slave driver of yourself."] Here Thoreau himself confuses—at least for rhetorical purposes—negative freedom (not being a slave) with autonomy (freedom from an employer or public opinion or one's self image). Indeed the way Thoreau glides from one to the other is one of the reasons why Berlin and others object to the equation of autonomy and freedom. Yet Thoreau redeems himself by identifying precisely what can be pernicious about autonomy, even as an internal state—the lack of criteria for what counts as valid or real desires and the tendency to be harder on ourselves than we should be." Elsewhere Thoreau's influence on Martin Luther King, Jr., is mentioned and "a letter from jail written by an unknown black minister in the early 1960s" is analyzed. About the latter King writes, "Like Thoreau, but in a much more exigent situation and less able to entertain ironic reflections about the superiority of society in jail to that on the outside, the minister/narrator comes to see the world, and hence his life, from a different angle." Referring to a "distinction made by [Hannah] Arendt" that is "relevant to our understanding of civil disobedience (as opposed to conscientious objection or what Thoreau called 'action from principle') as a form of participatory freedom," King asserts, "In 'Civil Disobedience' Arendt sharply distinguishes

conscientious objection from civil disobedience and places the activities of the civil rights movement in the latter category, a distinction bearing directly on the question of the role of conscience in politics and particularly on King's elevation of Thoreau and Socrates to canonical status in the history of civil disobedience. Arendt points out that in appealing to individual conscience both Socrates and Thoreau were engaged in a negative action against something; their appeal to conscience was a solitary one and thus not generalizable, and they were acting essentially from self-interest, albeit of the highest sort in that they could not live with themselves if they continued to obey the law." Finally, King asserts, "[T]he American political culture can generally incorporate radical individuals and movements with little difficulty. For instance the Thoreau memorialized in American

thinking is the Thoreau of non-violent civil disobedience not the fervent supporter of John Brown and his vision of redemption through the spilling of blood."

☞ *Out of the Woods: Essays in Environmental History*, edited by Char Miller and Hal Rothman (U Pittsburgh P), refers to Thoreau at several points, as one would expect. William Cronon points out what many others have noted, "[W]e still join Thoreau in declaring that 'in Wildness is the preservation of the World,' for wildness (as opposed to wilderness) can be found anywhere: in the seemingly tame fields and woodlots of Massachusetts, in the cracks of a Manhattan sidewalk, even in the cells of our own bodies." Cronon also quotes from *The Maine Woods* about Katahdin ("It was vast, Titanic..."), saying that Thoreau's emotions about the mountain "were no less ambivalent than Wordsworth's about the Alps." Cronon further asserts not only that "Thoreau's description owes as much to Wordsworth and other romantic contemporaries as to the rocks and clouds of Katahdin itself," but also that "Romantics like Thoreau joined Moses and the children of Israel in Exodus when 'they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud'" (quote from Exodus 16).

☞ Ester Schaler Buchholz writes astutely in *The Call of Solitude: Alonetime in a World of Attachment* (Simon and Schuster, 1997): "Few in our society respect the sanctity of chosen alonetime. Even in a saucy book dedicated to fellow solitaires on how to make oneself company enough, author Barbara Holland mocks Henry David Thoreau's time to himself because he was never that far from human community. The point missed, however, is that, for a while, Thoreau chose to reverse the typical priority of people over solitude, *not* to abandon attachments." Buchholz goes on to describe Thoreau's "famous autonomous move" to Walden Pond, quotes from *Walden*, and asserts, "He went there to examine his life and seek protection from the

contamination of industrial civilization. Thoreau and his friend Ralph Waldo Emerson believed in nature's healing powers and feared social demands as impositions that took people away from their true course in life. Yet neither man was antisocial or selfish. For example, both concerned themselves with the pursuit of people's rights and were against slavery. Walden Pond stands for

a successful romantic retreat from the vicissitudes of everyday life perhaps because Thoreau also responded to his needs for engagement. Choosing alonetime in lieu of social pleasures was a morally superior decision to Thoreau, much as it was to the monks of old. Thus, it also meant giving up many of the benefits of civilization and accepting the constraints of nature."

☞ *Toward the Livable City*, edited by Emilie Buchwald (Milkweed Editions, 2003), includes essays by Bill McKibbin, Jay Walljasper, and others. Terrell F. Dixon's "City Places, Sacred Spaces," opens with a description of encountering a screech owl while on "an ordinary bedtime stroll" in Houston, introduced by eight sentences on Thoreau and his words about sauntering. Dixon says Thoreau's thoughts "have helped to shape my attempt to come to terms with life as an environmentalist in the heart of the

We check and repress the divinity that stirs within us to fall down and worship the divinity that is dead without us.

Journal, 16 November 1851

nation's fourth-largest city." He writes that unlike now, in Thoreau's time "those who loved the natural world could disregard the city," but adds that "his use of sauntering to emphasize a basic connection between traveling a landscape on foot and recognizing its spirituality, between the act of walking and seeing the sacred in the landscapes around us, can still have meaning for the over 80 percent of Americans who now live in cities."

☞ *A Handmade Life: In Search of Simplicity*, by William Coperthwaite (Chelsea Green, 2002), is informed by the writings of Thoreau, with quotations on pages 19, 24, 37, 82; a reference on p.102 about finding "territories of our own such as [William] Blake and Thoreau did"; and a brief "Open Letter to Thoreau" on p. 108 in response to Thoreau's "The youth gets his materials together to build a bridge to the moon ... and at length the middle-aged man concludes to build a woodshed with them."

Coperthwaite writes, "But Henry! We've done it, gone to the moon—and at such a price—while what we needed all along was a better woodshed."

☞ Richard E. Wentz's *American Religious Traditions* (Fortress Press, 2003) includes several paragraphs on Transcendentalism as part of a chapter on "restorationism." "Emerson's contemporary, Henry David Thoreau," Wentz writes, "did not agree on all points with other Transcendentalists, but he shared their sympathy for the new beginnings in an American Eden. 'God himself culminates in the present moment,' he wrote, 'and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages.... Be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you.... Every man is lord of a realm beside which the earthly empire of the Czar is but a petty state.' " In a chapter titled "Religion and the Crisis of Authority," Wentz mentions that Emerson and Thoreau found "the texts of Oriental traditions'... congenial in the formation of their own versions of that American Puritan tradition known as Transcendentalism." A culminating chapter, "The Age of Radical Pluralism," mentions that with Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* the "Asian religious perspective had entered the American marketplace much more aggressively than ever before. Suddenly we realized that Henry David Thoreau scouting the New England wilderness with the *Bhagavad Gita* in his pack, had been a portent of things to come."

☞ The first issue of *The Drift*, a newsletter about life in the small town of Viroqua, Wisconsin, includes an essay titled "Viroqua Almanac: Where's Walden?" in which Joseph Hart writes, "[L]iving out my father's dream means going out to find my Walden. In 1972 ... my parents bought forty acres of northern forest along the U.S./Canadian border...." Hart continues later: "How do we make our life's decisions? How often do we chart a simple course from A to B? When it comes to such questions, Henry David Thoreau—in spite of his stature as America's pre-eminent nonconformist—is as bourgeois as Ben Franklin. In *Walden* he suggests: 'If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.' Untangle the pronouns, and this aphorism would fit any motivational calendar. Unless, as I do, one places a special emphasis on the word 'unexpected'...." An accompanying photo of a Wal-Mart storefront and parking lot bears the caption: "A Wal-Mart in *Walden*?"

☞ From Richard J. Leider's *The Power of Purpose: Creating Meaning in Your Life and Work* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1997): "Many times ... our activity becomes a false end in itself rather than a means to an end. Henry David Thoreau put it bluntly: 'It isn't enough to be busy. Ants are busy.' " The seventh chapter, "An Aliveness Questionnaire," includes "Question 3: Do I Live My Dreams?" which concludes: "As Henry David Thoreau said, 'If a man advances confidently in the direction of his dreams to live the life he has imagines, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.' Are you living your dreams?"

☞ Thomas J. Elpel's *Primitive Living, Self-Sufficiency, and Survival Skills: A Field Guide to Primitive Living Skills* (Lyons Press, 2004) includes an afterword titled "The Art of Doing Nothing," in which Elpel writes, "Henry David Thoreau wrote of having a rock for a paperweight at his cabin by Walden pond. He threw it out when he discovered he had to dust it. This is the very essence of a do-nothing attitude."

☞ Eunice Minette Schuster's "Native American Anarchism: A Study of Left-Wing American Individualism," first published as vol. 17, Nos. 1–4 (October 1931–July 1932) of *Smith College Studies in History*, reprinted by Loompanics in 1983 and again by Breakout Publications (Port Townsend, Wash.) in 1999, includes a section on Thoreau (pp. 46–51), placed squarely between sections on William Ellery Channing and John Humphrey Noyes. Schuster writes of "aesthetic anarchism," though she does say that he was "not only an anarchist in thought but also in action." Schuster quotes from "Civil Disobedience" and "A Plea for Captain John Brown," noting how Thoreau "builds up a case for the minority."

☞ From anarchist historian Max Nettlau's (1865–1944) *A Short History of Anarchism*, translated by Ida Pilat Isca (London: Freedom Press, 1996): "What I have called *American libertarian spiritualism* is summed up in the ideas and opinions of a small number of intellectuals in the United States, men and women of high integrity, who, chiefly in the years 1830–1860 ... dedicated themselves to freedom in their lives and actions...." Nettlau goes on to mention "those who wanted to destroy slavery immediately" and "those who, living in small communities, put their social convictions into action," naming Garrison, Emerson, and others, and including "the most distinguished figure of this circle, from the libertarian point of view ... Henry David Thoreau."

☞ From Cathy Johnson's *On Becoming Lost: A Naturalist's Search for Meaning* (Peregrine Smith Books, 1990): "Annie

2005 Annual Gathering

Thoreau: Nature, Science, and Higher Laws
7–10 July 2005
Concord, Massachusetts

Program details and registration materials will accompany the Spring Bulletin

The Annual Gathering Committee needs volunteers to assist with registration, setting up meeting rooms, hospitality, and a variety of other tasks associated with the Annual Gathering. To volunteer, please contact Jayne Gordon at (978) 369-5319 or jayne.gordon@thoreausociety.org

Dillard at Tinker Creek, Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*, Paul Lehmburg's *In the Strong Woods* ... these modern solitaires set an ember to glow in our imaginations. Why else would such books continue to be published, 130-odd years after H. D. Thoreau left us his musings in the Walden journals? [¶] The Walden writings inspire me for a very personal reason, one based on circumstance and need, and I vibrate like the ruffled surface of a still pond. For obvious reasons, too: who among us hasn't read at least snippets and quotes from Thoreau, sat stunned by the sudden truth we found there, and longed for the

opportunity and the time to be alone and observe, to write?" Later she writes, "We make pilgrimages to Walden Pond to search for the spirit of the place. The simple home we find there has been resurrected from Thoreau's journal description and set up as a mecca for visitors who share the vision. You can even buy a kit and construct a Walden of your own on the patch of ground of your choice. [¶] *Walden* speaks to something else in my makeup—or perhaps only to a rueful recognition of fact, of life as I find it now, at this moment...." Still later she writes, "When I go 'off the beaten path'—the path not only beaten but imprisoned under a layer of civilizing asphalt—I am in my own small wildness, my *Walden-for-a-day*."

☞ JoAnn Levy's *Unsettling the West: Eliza Farnham and Georgiana Bruce Kirby in Frontier California* (Heyday Books, 2004) mentions Thoreau twice, first saying that the *New-York Tribune* published in 1856 "a roll of speakers engaged for the 'lecturing season,' giving 'the names of those who avouched to us as having been hitherto engaged in that capacity, and having so acquitted themselves as to induce further invitations." Eliza Farnham was on the list, "one of only three women. The list was further distinguished by the names of Henry Ward Beecher, A. Bronson Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry Thoreau." Levy later writes of Farnham's visit to Perth Amboy, where she had enrolled her son Charles in the Eagleswood Academy "at the failing utopian community of Raritan Bay Union," adding, "Eagleswood, in the opinion of Henry Thoreau, invited to lecture there, was a 'queer place.' " There follow two paragraphs from Thoreau's letter to his sister Sophia, dated 1 November 1856.

☞ Michael Johnathon's *Wood Songs: A Folksinger's Social Commentary, Homestead Manual, and Song Book* (Lexington, Ky.: Poetman Records USA, 2003) is a sort of autobiography interspersed with chapters about the author's influences (whose names aren't revealed until the end of each of these chapters). The chapter on Thoreau, titled "The Artist, or 'I Wanna Suck' Two," is a bizarre and somewhat incoherent mixture of fact and fancy, describing as it does someone who "would collect books and devour them over and over," who "was a terrible writer. In the opinion of his peers, family and critics he completely totally sucked." Thoreau was someone who "would spend hours, weeks and months delving into the most inane and uninteresting of subjects," was someone who after his death "was settling into the sadly expected obscurity that his peers and critics so deemed for him" until "several decades later" when a student "at a northeastern USA college ... happened upon an old book in the library" that "all of a sudden ... made sense."

☞ John Jerome's *On Turning Sixty-Five: Notes From the Field* (Random House, 2000) is a firsthand philosophical account of one writer's coping with his aging body, including neck surgery, recovery, and canoe trips. The book is organized monthly over the course of a year and by interspersing quotations from Thoreau's journals, followed by musings upon Thoreau. At the outset

Jerome says that he purchased the two-volume set of Thoreau's journals "years ago" but only got a quarter of the way through them. "Maybe, I thought, I'd get going on them again. Whatever he wrote, his entire life, concerned

Packed in my mind lie all the clothes Which outward nature wears....

—“Wednesday,” *A Week*

the one central question: how to live. I figured I could still use advice on that subject, even in my sixty-fifth year." Jerome describes how he'd been a fan of *Walden* in college ("What appealed to me was pure punk revolt: the young man so scathingly denouncing the hypocrisy of his elders") and after teaching *Walden* in high school, went on to "shove" the book at an agency colleague or two "to little effect," and still later reread the book, appalled by its "ringing self-dramatization" and finding that Thoreau "kept getting off good lines, but mostly to point out how pure his own position was. He came off as a sloganizer, an adman himself." Jerome says of his personally annotated copy of *Walden*, "The margins of the first twenty pages are now embarrassing, filled with semihysterical (and still sophomoric) rebuttal. The misanthropic arrogance, the sarcasm...." Yes, "but I still loved the good lines," Jerome writes. "'Write with fury,' he once advised an aspiring young author, 'and correct with phlegm.' I keep that notice posted above my computer screen." "Watch it, the author is trying to commit wisdom," Jerome writes about his own words. "It's a terrible temptation. After all, wisdom is allegedly an attribution of age.... I'd love to be able to think of myself as wise, but that would require ignoring the evidence. I hanker after wisdom instead, but have to outsource it.... I suppose that's the attraction to Thoreau. He was not stingy with advice, some of which sounds like wisdom and probably is. It was a quality he valued, perhaps too highly: 'I am sane only when I have risen above my common sense....'" By the end of his book, Jerome has recovered from neck surgery, the firewood is in, and he still has "half of Thoreau to read."

☞ In the new CD *Tourist Season*, a comedic take-off on *The Maine Woods* by New Hampshire humorist Travis Wallace, Thoreau dickers with a used-wagon salesman, searches for an Indian guide by placing a Help Wanted ad in the *Boston Globe*, and receives advice from a fashion designer..

☞ John Leland in *Hip: A History* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004) claims that several writers of the American Renaissance were America's first "hipsters": "Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman and Herman Melville, in a brief flurry from 1850 to 1855, laid out the formal groundwork for hip. They are hip's O.G.'s, or original gangstas. No skater, raver, indie-rocker, thug, Pabst Blue Ribbon drinker or wi-fi slacker today acts without their permission."

☞ From Stanley Aronowitz's *How Class Works: Power and Social Movement* (Yale UP, 2003), in a chapter titled "Ecology and Class": "In the nineteenth century, such figures as the naturalist Henry David Thoreau, the sociologist Lester Frank Ward, and the

economist Henry George were among the few who were acutely aware of the dangers of unbridled industrialization and raised their voices on behalf of conservation of wilderness areas." Aronowitz continues, after two sentences about Ward: "Whereas Thoreau defended the natural environment for its own sake, even going so far as to engage in ecological sabotage to defend fish and other wildlife, many of his fellow environmentalists, such as George, framed their concerns in terms of the need to preserve nature as a resource for eventual human use." No source is given to substantiate the claim about Thoreau as saboteur, but we assume he refers to the passage in the "Saturday" chapter of *A Week* about the impulse to take a crow-bar to the Billerica dam on behalf of the shad.

☞ *The Power of Impossible Thinking: Transforming the Business of Your Life and the Life of Your Business* (Wharton School Publishing, [2004?]), by Yoram (Jerry) Wind and Colin Crook, with Robert Gunther, quotes Thoreau at the head of chapter 8 ("Dismantle the Old Order")—"If you have built castles...."—and at the end of that chapter asserts, "New mental models are like Henry David Thoreau's 'castles in the air' that hover above the existing world and often have little visible impact."

☞ Montréal librarian Danielle Dennie wrote to Minnesota librarian Chris Dodge on the morning of 26 August 2004: "I was watching Bob and Margaret (a cartoon on TV about a British couple) and Bob, a dentist, had lost his job and started reading *Walden* and totally got this new perspective on life! He became a landscape gardener and was completely serene and happy. He gave *Walden* to a big shot lawyer and the lawyer, after reading the book, quit his job and went to live in nature."

☞ In the preface to *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, (U California P, 2004), co-editors Jacquelyn Baas and Mary Jane Jacob write about a series of "retreat seminars" from which the book springs. "The work we did together [at these gatherings]," they write, "might be defined by its relationship to this emerging non-static community of persons: a 'Sangha' of practitioners on the arts. Lewis Hyde, who knows well the value of Buddhism for reflecting on the human condition today, spoke at one of our meetings of the talent for being 'accident prone.' His example was Henry David Thoreau: 'Sometimes by luck, sometimes by design, he had both the encouraging climate and material conditions' required. But, Hyde went on, 'The problem both then and now for those who care about the creative commons in America is to figure out ways to encourage happy accidents such as these, or better yet, ways to turn them into happy designs....'" Lewis Hyde, it will be recalled, delivered the keynote address at our 2002 Annual Gathering.

☞ Robert D. Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon & Schuster, 2000) refers to "Civil Disobedience" as a paean to individualism: "Liberation from ossified community bonds is a recurrent and honored theme in our culture, from the Pilgrims' storied escape from religious convention in the seventeenth-century to the lyric nineteenth-century paens to individualism by Emerson ("Self-Reliance"), Thoreau ("Civil Disobedience"), and Whitman ("Song of Myself")...." In a chapter titled "The Dark Side of Social Capital" Putnam writes of the "stock figure in American letters"—the "doltish, narrow-minded, materialistic, snobbish, glad-handing, bigoted, middle-class joiner." He goes on, "As early as 1865 [sic] Henry David Thoreau wrote contemptuously in the *Atlantic Monthly* that 'the American has dwindled into an Odd fellow, one

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who may be known by the development of his organ of gregariousness and his manifest lack of intellect.'

☞ In the introduction to *Spar: Words in Place* (Kentville, Nova Scotia: Gaspereau Press, 2002), Peter Sanger defends Thoreau's linking of the word "sauntering" to "à la Saint Terre" and "sans terre" against a latter attack that such playful imaginary derivations were "puerilities." "[W]e can both insist upon etymological precisions," writes Sanger, "and value the accumulation of co-inherent meanings which human imagination and ethical considerations add to them."

☞ The September/October 2004 issue of *Preservation* magazine includes a one-page interview with Don Henley about his role in the Walden Woods Project. Henley says he read "some Thoreau and Emerson" in the late 1960s when he was struggling with his father's terminal heart disease, and found their words not only helped him cope, but also "prompted me to think about our relationship to the world around us and guided me to a lifelong interest in historic preservation and conservation."

☞ In his book *Library: An Unquiet History* (W. W. Norton, 2003), Matthew Battles quotes from *Shakespeare in Limerick*, a 1900 adaptation by Brainerd McKee, then writes: "Henry David Thoreau could have been reading such doggerel in the dim alcoves of Harvard's Gore Hall when he wrote, '[I]n a library [t]here is all the recorded wit of the world, but none of the recording, a mere accumulated, and not truly cumulative treasure; ... Shakespeare and Milton did not foresee into what company they were to fall.' Even for Thoreau—who browsed nature as if it were the most copious library of all, who found genius and grandeur expressed fully in its least significant details—bad books in the library fall like hail on literature's eternal spring morn. But the same sort of secret wonders Thoreau discovered among furtive squirrels and browsed-over apple trees is alive in the library too." The ellipsis is Battles's..

☞ Beaucoups kudos to Richard Winslow III and, most especially, Chris Dodge for helping us develop a tremendous backlog of notes for "Notes & Queries." All of these notes will see print in time, and we may, in the interim, post them on the Web so that members may consult them there.

Additions to the Thoreau Bibliography

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Please submit items for the Spring Bulletin to your editor before

15 March 2005

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Announcements

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are needed to coordinate programs in their local communities in conjunction with the upcoming Thoreau Educational DVD, *Life Without Principle*. Please contact Mel Hopper (melvynhopper@shaw.ca), Producer, or Jayne Gordon (Jayne.gordon@thoreausociety.org), Thoreau Society Executive Director.

Calendar of Events

MAY 25–29

AMERICAN LITERATURE ASSOCIATION

The first of the usual two sessions sponsored by the Thoreau Society at the ALA convention, held this year at the Westin Copley Place in Boston on 25–29 May 2005, will feature presentations on “Global Civil Society” by Wai Chee Dimock of Yale University,

PLEASE NOTE

More detailed, comprehensive, and timely descriptions of announcements and events are available at

www.thoreausociety.org

Laura Dassow Walls of the University of South Carolina, and Peter Bellis of the University of Miami; the second session will be a round-table discussion on “Teaching Thoreau’s Natural History Essays” featuring Bradley P. Dean of West Peterborough, N.H., Lance Newman of California State University at San Marcos, Audrey Raden of the City University of New York, Ed Schofield of Tower Hill Botanic Garden (Boylston, Mass.), and Michael Ziser of the University of California at Davis.

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Membership: Thoreau Society, Penn State Altoona, 129 Community Arts Center, Altoona, PA, 16601, U.S.A.; voice-mail: (978) 369-5359; e-mail: membership@thoreausociety.org.

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